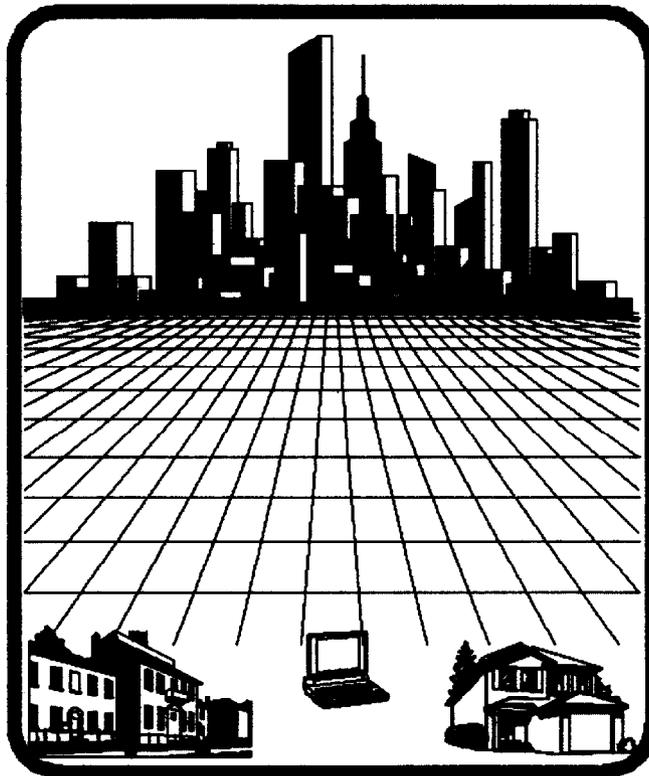


IMPLEMENTING TELECOMMUTING

INTERAGENCY TELECOMMUTING PROGRAM



U.S. Department of Transportation



U.S. GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION

IMPLEMENTING TELECOMMUTING
MANUAL FOR THE INTERAGENCY TELECOMMUTING PROGRAM

Prepared by Wendell H. Joice, Ph.D.
Cooperative Administrative Support Program
Office of Workplace Initiatives (CW)
U.S. General Services Administration
18th and F Streets N.W. Room 7007
Washington, D.C. 20405

Phone: (202) 273-4660
Fax : (202) 273-4670

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This manual includes information/documentation provided by:

- ◆ Ellen Russell, U.S. Office of Personnel Management
- ◆ Maxine Sterling, U.S. General Services Administration
- ◆ The Joint National Council of Field Labor Locals-Management Flexiplace Task Force,
U.S. Department of Labor

The General Services Administration gratefully acknowledges the above contributions.

REFERENCE MATERIALS

Following is a list of reference materials utilized, directly or indirectly, by developers of this manual. Some of these materials are no longer in print but are available for downloading from the specified electronic bulletin boards.

- ◆ **Energy Emissions and The Social Consequences of Telecommuting**
U.S. Department of Energy: Office of Policy, Planning and Program Evaluation - (202) 586-4456
- ◆ **Federal Information Resources Management Regulations (FIRMR)**
U.S. General Services Administration : Information Resources Management Reference Center - (202) 501-0666.
- ◆ **Final Report of the Federal Flexible Workplace Pilot Project (Flexiplace) Work-At-Home Component**
U.S. Office of Personnel Management: Office of Personnel Research and Development. Available on GSA Office of Workplace Initiatives Bulletin Board "CASUCOM" - (202) 501-7707. Also available on OPM Bulletin Board "OPM Mainstreet" - (202) 606-4800.
- ◆ **Flexiplace: Questions and Answers on Computer and Telephone Issues**
U.S. General Services Administration : Information Resources Management Services. Available on GSA CASUCOM Bulletin Board - (202) 501-7707.
- ◆ **Managing End User Computing for Users With Disabilities**
U.S. General Services Administration : Clearinghouse on Computer Accommodation - (202) 501-4906
- ◆ **Policy and Procedures Manual for the Guidance of Federal Agencies**
U.S. General Accounting Office: Document Distribution Center - (202) 512-6000
- ◆ **Transportation Implications of Telecommuting**
U.S. Department of Transportation - (202) 366-5403

BACKGROUND

The U.S. Department of Transportation and the U.S. General Services Administration are sponsoring a governmentwide telecommuting program to increase opportunities for employees to work part of their regular workweek at an alternate worksite: **at home or at a telecommuting center**. A telecommuting center (**telecenter**) is a multi-agency facility that provides a geographically convenient office setting as an alternative to the Federal employee's main office. Federal telecenters also serve as conveniently located administrative support centers for home-based telecommuters. This manual is provided to assist Federal agencies and their employees establish and participate in such flexible (alternative) workplace arrangements (**Flexiplace**). These arrangements are also called "**telecommuting**" arrangements and participants are called **telecommuters**.

Flexiplace arrangements operate according to guidelines and procedures established by the U.S. Office of Personnel Management and the GSA. These guidelines and procedures are included in this manual.

The establishment of flexible workplace arrangements is driven by efforts to improve the quality of worklife, employee productivity, the balance of work and personal/family life, the environment, energy utilization, and other social or economic conditions. The telecommuting movement is facilitated by innovations in human resources management, changes in the nature of work, and new technology. Many current workers can perform their work from virtually anywhere.

DEFINITIONS

In this document, 'main office' will be used to refer to the telecommuter's primary traditional worksite as opposed to the 'alternate' or 'alternative' worksite (telecenter or employee residence).

Following is the text of a memorandum from the President to the heads of executive departments and agencies directing them to establish a program to encourage and support the expansion of flexible family-friendly work arrangements including telecommuting.

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

July 11, 1994

MEMORANDUM FOR THE HEADS OF EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENTS AND AGENCIES

SUBJECT: Expanding Family-Friendly Work
Arrangements in the Executive Branch

In order to recruit and retain a Federal work force that will provide the highest quality of service to the American people, the executive branch must implement flexible work arrangements to create a "family-friendly" workplace. Broad use of flexible work arrangements to enable federal employees to better balance their work and family responsibilities can increase employee effectiveness and job satisfaction, while decreasing turnover rates and absenteeism. I therefore adopt the National Performance Review's recommendation that a more family-friendly workplace be created by expanding opportunities for Federal workers to participate in flexible work arrangements, consistent with the mission of the executive branch to serve the public.

The head of each executive department or agency (hereafter collectively "agency" or "agencies") is hereby directed to establish a program to encourage and support the expansion of flexible family-friendly work arrangements, including: job sharing; career part-time employment; alternative work schedules; telecommuting and satellite work locations. Such a program shall include:

- (1) identifying agency positions that are suitable for flexible work arrangements;
- (2) adopting appropriate policies to increase the opportunities for employees in suitable positions to participate in such flexible work arrangements;
- (3) providing appropriate training and support necessary to implement flexible work arrangements;
and
- (4) identifying barriers to implementing this directive and providing recommendations for addressing such barriers to the President's Management Council.

I direct the Director of the Office of Personnel Management ("OPM") and the Administrator of General Services ("GSA") to take all necessary steps to support and encourage the expanded implementation of flexible work arrangements. The OPM and GSA shall work in concert to promptly review and revise regulations that are barriers to such work arrangements and develop legislative proposals, as needed, to achieve the goals of this directive. The OPM and GSA also shall assist agencies, as requested, to implement this directive.

The President's Management Council, in conjunction with the Office of Management and Budget, shall ensure that any guidance necessary to implement the actions set forth in this directive is provided.

Independent agencies are requested to adhere to this directive to the extent permitted by law.

This directive is for the internal management of the executive branch and is not intended to, and does not, create any right or benefit, substantive or procedural, enforceable by a party against the United States, its agencies or instrumentalities, its officers or employees, or any other person.

The Director of the Office of Management and Budget is authorized and directed to publish this directive in the Federal Register.

William J. Clinton

CONTENTS

This manual includes the following documents:

- o **SECTION I: GETTING STARTED** - Brief summary of steps to implementing Flexiplace
- o **SECTION II: General guidance from the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) for establishing and participating in Federal flexiplace (telecommuting) arrangements.**
- o **SECTION III: General guidance from GSA for establishing and participating in telecommuting arrangements with telecenters. This information is more detailed than the OPM guidance and, while it focuses on telecenters, much of it also applies to home-based telecommuting.**
- o **SECTION IV: Flexiplace questions and answers. This document, which was consolidated from documents prepared by GSA and by the U.S. Department of Labor, provides answers to commonly asked questions regarding Federal telecommuting arrangements.**
- o **APPENDIX A: Sample Work Agreement between the agency and the telecommuter**
- o **APPENDIX B: Sample safety checklist for the home-based telecommuter**
- o **APPENDIX C: Sample employee checkout list for managers of telecommuters**

SECTION I

GETTING STARTED

Once the necessary approval or direction has been received within your Agency, and specific positions have been tentatively identified as appropriate for Flexiplace arrangements, the participants (management, unions, and telecommuters) will all have certain responsibilities. What follows is a short summary of steps that management needs to take. The rest of the manual consists of more detailed information on the considerations and actions that are needed for operating or participating in the Flexiplace program. This manual contains references to laws, regulations, and policies; most of this manual, however, consists of guidance and recommendations which agencies may accept, amend, or reject as they see fit. The guidance and recommendations are based on expert judgement backed up by substantial and documented program experience in telecommuting .

- o Designate a capable person to serve as the agency Flexiplace coordinator and contact. Also, to the extent possible, establish an individual or task force to provide technical information regarding legal, human resources, and technology/telecommunications issues as they relate to your organization.
- o Contact the Federal task force that is coordinating governmentwide application of telecommuting programs and register your coordinator. Your coordinator will be provided with generic materials, guidance, and other information to use in developing an implementation plan and associated policies specific to your agency.
- o Initiate informal discussion with local union representatives, if applicable.
- o If necessary, determine employee interest.
- o Explore the feasibility of the alternate workplace(s) with interested employees and identify equipment needs and costs. Visit the telecenters if applicable.
- o Make an official announcement and commitment to the program and refer inquiries to your coordinator.
- o Train all involved; be sure to explain the program's operation to nonparticipants within affected units.
- o Implement the program.

SECTION II

GENERAL GUIDANCE FROM THE OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT (OPM)

This section presents the cover memo and general Flexiplace guidance which OPM developed and sent to Federal personnel directors in October 1993. This guidance applies to both work-at-home as well as telecenter programs. **The cover memo confirms agency authority to utilize Flexiplace (telecommuting) arrangements.** For more detailed information on any of the topics contained in the following guidance, see Section III (although focused on telecenters, the guidance in Section III also applies generally to work-at-home programs).

MEMORANDUM FOR PERSONNEL DIRECTORS

FROM: LORRAINE A. GREEN
DEPUTY DIRECTOR

Subject: Alternative Workplace Arrangements (Flexiplace)

OPM is providing information to help you set up alternative workplace arrangements (flexiplace) as recommended by the National Performance Review. Well-designed flexiplace programs are "family friendly" and offer many benefits to employers, employees, and society as a whole. We encourage you to offer this flexibility to employees in situations where accountability for customer service can be assured. To develop effective flexiplace programs, agencies should seek employee views and also bargain or consult, as appropriate, with unions representing affected employees.

Unless a specific statute provides otherwise, agencies have the authority to permit employees to work at locations other than the main office. Employees on flexiplace typically work at home but can work at other agency-approved locations. For example, the General Services Administration (GSA) is setting up several Interagency Telecommuting Centers in outlying areas of the Nation's Capital for Federal employees who currently travel long distances between home and work.

Attachments to this memorandum describe the reasons for flexiplace, basic parameters for its use, the conditions under which it is most likely to succeed, and the personnel policies and procedures that apply to employees on flexiplace. Also included is a sample agreement form agencies may use for employees who routinely work under flexiplace arrangements.

Other information is available from OPM's electronic bulletin board "Mainstreet." Included are materials developed for and by agencies that participated in the Flexiplace Pilot Project, for example, procedures, forms, training materials, and evaluation surveys. To read or download this information, computer users can call "Mainstreet" by dialing 202-606-4800 at up to 14.4 kbps and following the instructions to reach the Flexiplace/Telecommuting Forum. The forum also lets Federal employees share information about their experiences with alternative workplace

arrangements.

If you have questions, please call Warren Master (GSA) on 202-273-4660.

Guidelines for Alternative Workplace Arrangements (Flexiplace)

1. Governmentwide Pilot Project

OPM developed these guidelines based on a Governmentwide project in which employees from 14 Federal agencies worked at locations other than their main offices. In the project evaluation, supervisors reported that individual and organizational performance was as good or better than before. Employees reported improved motivation and quality of life as well as reduced commuting time, job-related expenses, and sick leave use. Labor-management cooperation contributed to the success of agency pilot programs.

2. Reasons For Flexiplace

Employers offer alternative workplace arrangements for many reasons. Flexiplace:

- Decreases traffic, parking congestion, energy consumption, and air pollution;
- Accommodates employees who have temporary or continuing health problems or who might otherwise have to retire for disability;
- Extends employment opportunities to people with disabilities, including former employees who have partially recovered from work-related injuries, who can do the job from an offsite location;
- Improves quality of worklife and performance, e.g., reduces office overcrowding and/or provides a distraction-free environment for reading, thinking and writing;
- Provides services when the main office is closed, e.g., after a natural disaster;
- Improves morale by giving employees more options to balance work and family demands.

3. Basic Parameters for Flexiplace in Federal Agencies

a. Flexiplace is a management option rather than an employee benefit and does not change the terms and conditions of appointment. Employee participation is voluntary and subject to management approval. An employee who works on flexiplace (other than for short periods) should sign an agreement with the agency. (Agencies may use or modify the sample at Appendix A.) Cancelling an arrangement is up to either the employee or the supervisor, with notice and in accordance with any procedures the agency establishes.

b. Flexiplace should not adversely affect the performance of the employee on flexiplace or others in the work group.

c. Supervisors must properly certify time and attendance.

d. The employee must have a safe and adequate place to work offsite that is free from interruptions and that provides the necessary level of security and protection for Government property. Although flexiplace will give some employees more time for their family responsibilities, flexiplace is not a substitute for dependent care. Employees must not use duty time for any purpose other than official duties.

e. The Government may place Government-owned computers and telecommunications equipment in employee homes or at other alternative worksites, but the Government retains ownership of and control of hardware, software, and data. Such equipment is for official use only and its repair and maintenance are the responsibility of the agency. For more information, see GSA publications, *Flexiplace: Questions and Answers on Management Issues* and *Flexiplace: Questions and Answers on Computer and Telephone Issues*. Fax a request for these publications to 202-501-2482.

f. Agencies may provide employees with FTS2000 authorization cards. To the extent permitted by law, agencies may pay for the installation of telephone lines in private residences. For the past few years, the Treasury, Postal Service and General Government Appropriations Act included an exception to the general statutory prohibition on agency installation of telephone lines in private residences. The exception covered employees who participated in the flexiplace pilot project. (See Public Law 102-506.) We expect the FY 94 appropriations act to include a similar exception for employees who work at home in accordance with OPM guidelines.

4. Conditions for Successful Flexiplace Arrangements

The Governmentwide project, as well as others in the public and private sector, yielded information about factors that contribute to successful alternative workplace arrangements. For example:

a. **Written policies and procedures** often make flexiplace programs more understandable. Policies should cover short-term as well as continuing arrangements. **Project coordinators** facilitate the development of programs. **Orientation** sessions for flexiplace employees and their supervisors ensure a common understanding of program requirements.

b. The **nature of the work**, as well as the **characteristics of the employee** and the **supervisor**, should be suitable for flexiplace. Work suitable for flexiplace depends on job content, rather than job title, type of appointment, or work schedule. For example, flexiplace is feasible for work that requires thinking and writing--data analysis, reviewing grants or cases, writing decisions or reports; for telephone-intensive tasks--setting up a conference, obtaining information, following up on participants in a study; and for computer-oriented tasks--programming, data entry, word processing. Positions in the Governmentwide project included writer/editor, scientist, investigator, psychologist, environmental engineer, budget analyst, tax examiner, and computer specialist.

c. **Unsuitable Work.** Work may not be suitable for flexiplace if the employee needs to have extensive face-to-face contact with the supervisor, other employees, clients, or the general public; if the employee needs frequent access to material which cannot be moved from the main office; if the agency cannot provide any special facilities or equipment that are necessary; or if it would be too costly for the agency to duplicate the same level of security at the alternative workplace.

d. The **characteristics of an employee** are particularly important. The employee should be an organized, highly disciplined, and conscientious self-starter who requires minimal supervision.

His or her performance should be at least "fully successful." In certain situations, however, a supervisor may choose to offer flexiplace as a way to help an employee improve performance. Flexiplace is not suitable for new employees who need to be in the office to learn the organization, for employees who require on-the-job training, who need close supervision, or who thrive on interaction with co-workers and would suffer from the isolation of working alone. The **characteristics of the supervisor** are also critical. He or she should be willing to try out the new arrangement and take the necessary steps to ensure its success. Most importantly, the supervisor should be comfortable managing by results.

e. **Office/offsite scheduling.** Most flexiplace employees spend part of the workweek in the main office to improve communication, minimize isolation, and use facilities not available offsite. Agencies should, however, determine the best balance for individual employees and situations.

5. Personnel Policies/Procedures

a. **Official Duty Station.** A flexiplace employee's official duty station generally continues to be the main office, not the alternative workplace. Entitlement to locality-based comparability payment, special salary rates, travel allowances, and relocation expenses is based on the official duty station.

b. **Hours of Duty.** The existing rules on hours of duty apply to flexiplace employees. Management determines employee work schedules consistent with the requirements of the work group and provisions of any applicable bargaining agreements. Agencies may approve alternative work schedules for flexiplace employees.

c. **Pay and Leave.** Existing rules on pay and leave administration apply to flexiplace employees. Special provisions on overtime pay and night pay for employees on alternative work schedules may make it easier for agencies to schedule flexiplace employees to work at the times they are most productive.

d. **Overtime.** The existing rules on overtime under title 5, United States Code, and the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) apply to flexiplace employees. Supervisors should make sure that flexiplace employees work overtime only with advance approval and should cancel flexiplace privileges of employees who continue to work unapproved overtime.

e. **Certification and Control of Time and Attendance.** Supervisors must report time and attendance to ensure that flexiplace employees are paid only for work performed and that absences from scheduled tours of duty are accounted for. The General Accounting Office (GAO) requires agencies with employees working at remote sites to provide reasonable assurance that the employees are working when scheduled, for example, by determining the reasonableness of the work output for the time spent or by having the supervisor make occasional telephone calls or visits during the employee's scheduled work time. (See Title 6 of GAO's Policy and Procedures Manual for the Guidance of Federal Agencies.)

f. **Position Descriptions and Performance Standards.** Flexiplace will seldom require major changes in position descriptions, but may affect factors such as supervisory controls or work environment. Performance standards for flexiplace employees should be results-oriented and should describe the quantity and quality of expected work products and the method of evaluation. Generally, supervisors will use the same measures for flexiplace employees and employees who perform similar tasks in the main office.

g. **Home Inspections.** Agencies should make sure that the flexiplace employee's worksite meets acceptable standards. Some agencies in the Governmentwide project required employees to complete a self-certification safety inspection form. Onsite inspections (with adequate notice to the employee) are another option.

h. **Workers' Compensation.** Flexiplace employees are covered by the Federal Employees Compensation Act (FECA) and may qualify for payment for on-the-job injury or occupational illness.

i. **Group Dismissal.** A flexiplace employee may sometimes, but not always, be affected by an emergency requiring the main office to close. For example, on a "snow closing day," the agency should not excuse a flexiplace employee unless he or she cannot perform work because the main office is closed. When both the main office and the alternative worksite are affected by a widespread emergency, the agency should grant the flexiplace employee excused absence as appropriate. When an emergency affects only the alternative worksite for a major portion of the workday, the agency can require the flexiplace employee to report to the main office, approve annual leave or leave without pay, or authorize an excused absence.

SECTION III

OPERATING GUIDANCE FOR TELECOMMUTING CENTERS

This section contains general guidance developed by GSA for Federal telecommuting center (telecenter) programs. While focused on telecenter programs, this guidance also applies (in most cases) to work-at-home programs.

BACKGROUND

In January, 1990, the Federal government began piloting flexible workplace arrangements (Flexiplace) in which employees would be permitted to work one or more days per week at alternate worksites. These alternate worksites included the employees homes and/or geographically convenient satellite work centers (telecommuting centers). The first phase of this initiative focused on work-at-home arrangements and was successfully completed in 1993. In 1993, GSA began serving as the lead agency for the next phase of Flexiplace: the development of telecommuting centers (telecenters). The following document provides guidance for establishing and/or participating in Federal telecenter programs.

PROJECT ORGANIZATION

General Services Administration - GSA's role is to develop or facilitate the development of the telecommuting centers utilizing its expertise in space acquisition and management, telecommunications and information technology services. Also, GSA will be the initial point of contact between Federal agency clients and the organizers/operators of the telecommuting centers.

Cooperative Administrative Support Unit (CASU) Program of GSA - In some cases, CASU program offices will serve as the project manager and coordinator.

Local Jurisdiction Organizations - Local jurisdiction organizations (LJOs) are business groups, colleges, Federal or state/local government agencies, and/or other organizations who serve as organizers and sponsors of the telecenter in their jurisdiction. LJO's may work with the CASU program and other GSA organizations to select center sites and carry out the operational details for establishing a center.

Center Operator - The center operator is the organization that has the responsibility for operating and maintaining the center. The center operator may be a government agency, public sector, or private sector organization.

Center Clients - Center clients (customer organizations) are the Federal or state and local government agencies/organizations who utilize the workstation(s) in the center.

SECTION A: PARTICIPATION CRITERIA

1. Basic Considerations

Agencies considering participation in telecommuting centers should identify the reason(s) for initiating the arrangement and potential benefits to be derived. Such identified reasons and benefits form an important basis for participation and drive subsequent decisions concerning which occupations or employees will take part, and how the arrangement will be structured. Examples of reasons for initiating a telecommuting arrangement may include: enhancing recruiting and retention capabilities; improving the quality of worklife and the balance of work and personal life for employees; improving productivity and service to clients; reducing facility requirements, maintenance costs, air pollution, and/or traffic congestion; targeting new labor markets; and accommodating employees with disabilities. Clearly defined expectations that show the benefits to the organization and employee alike are keys to implementing a successful program.

2. Position Suitability

The content of a job rather than its title determines its suitability for telecommuting. Generally, suitable jobs are those that contain tasks that can be performed away from the main office. Research experience with telecommuting programs suggests that such suitable jobs cover a wide variety of occupations (technical, administrative, scientific, professional, clerical, managerial, etc.). Preliminary review of position descriptions can help identify jobs suitable for telecommuting.

3. Participant Selection

Generally, candidates for participation should have a job performance rating of "fully successful" or better. Other characteristics considered indicative of successful telecommuters are: A history of reliable and responsible discharge of work duties, ability to establish priorities and manage time, and a proven track record of personal motivation. Participation should be voluntary for both the employee and management.

Participation in this program should be targeted to current employees who have a working familiarity with their organizations. Telecommuting experts maintain that such employees are more likely to be successful telecommuters than are new employees. Agencies may determine special situations, however, in which new employees will be allowed to participate.

Supervisory concurrence is very important. In deciding whether to approve a telecommuting arrangement, supervisors should consider the suitability of the work to be performed, the arrangement's impact on other staff, and the candidate's characteristics and work history.

When selecting participants, agencies will need to ensure that the telecenter will be an adequate facility for successful job performance by the participant.

Agencies are encouraged to seek union views about selection criteria and procedures for participants in bargaining units and negotiate as appropriate.

SECTION B: POSITION DESCRIPTIONS AND PERFORMANCE ISSUES

1. Position Descriptions

The telecommuting arrangement will seldom require major changes in position descriptions. However, it may affect factors such as supervisory controls or work environment. If telecommuting results in changes to actual duties, agencies should examine all factors for impact.

2. Performance Standards

Agencies should establish methods for evaluating work performed at the alternative worksite; this should include progress reporting and/or other procedures to facilitate employee-supervisor communication. As provided by section 4302 (a) (2) of title 5, USC, employee participation in developing performance standards is encouraged. Participating supervisors and employees should discuss and clearly define tasks and expectations.

Although the substance of performance standards and elements is outside the duty to bargain, agencies may consider union input when developing performance standards for bargaining unit positions. Similarly, agencies may invite union input into the development of work agreements.

Critical elements and performance standards for telecommuters should generally mirror traditional standards for such employees, with adjustments for unique circumstances encountered when working at telecommuting centers. Results-oriented standards which provide a reasonable basis for evaluating job performance should be used for all employees regardless of whether or not they are telecommuters.

Generally, evaluations of job performance for telecommuters should be based on existing standards and expectations. In order to evaluate job performance as well as to certify time and attendance for telecommuters, managers should establish clearly defined work assignments and expectations. Work performance should be evaluated according to:

- (1) existing quantity and quality expectations, such as a specified number of claims processed without errors during a specified period; or
- (2) existing expectations monitored through periodic progress reports by the telecommuter; for example, reporting progress on specified steps of an on-going project in which a reasonable time frame, based on past experience, has been established for each step (completing and reporting the steps involved in a major audit, investigation, research project, job analysis, etc.) (Applies to work for which performance and progress can be evaluated by a supervisor who has the experience and knowledge to certify and evaluate timeliness, quality, and quantity aspects of work reported by the telecommuter); or
- (3) other appropriate measures, such as timely completion of high quality products.

If, due to the nature of the job or other circumstances, these latter methods are not feasible, then performance should be evaluated according to expectations developed and refined through systematic progress reporting by the telecommuter. For example, in a situation in which the supervisor does not know how long a given work assignment should take, the supervisor can develop such expectations based on progress reports of sufficient detail and breadth (e.g., how long it took the telecommuter to accomplish a given task). Where necessary and possible, additional information (such as how long other employees take to accomplish the same work) may be useful.

3. Work Agreements

Supervisors and employees participating in the telecommuting program should sign a work agreement that outlines the terms and conditions of the arrangement. A sample work agreement is provided at Appendix A. Agencies may modify or revise the sample agreement to meet specific agency requirements as well as reflect issues negotiated with the union.

At a minimum, the agreement should spell out the voluntary nature of the program, its length, the official and alternate duty stations, hours of duty, reporting requirements, leave approval, overtime, workers compensation, ownership and repair of equipment, and standards of conduct. This agreement should be consistent with agency work schedule policies (for example, the agency Alternate Work Schedule policy) and with any applicable labor contracts.

The supervisor and the employee will agree on an initial time period for participating in the telecommuting program. The agreement may be renewed at the end of the agreed upon period.

4. Cancellation

Due to the voluntary nature of the program, telecommuters and management have the right to terminate the telecommuting arrangement at any time. The termination of a telecommuting arrangement with a particular employee should not be confused with ending the agency's contractual arrangement, if any, with GSA and/or with the telecenter. Although telecommuting is not an employee entitlement or right, termination of employees from the program must be done in accordance with established administrative procedures and union negotiated agreements, as applicable.

SECTION C: TIME AND ATTENDANCE ISSUES

1. Work Schedules

Existing rules in title 5, USC on premium pay, hours of duty, and scheduling work apply to telecommuters. Also, telecommuters may be covered (non-exempt employees) under the overtime provisions of the Fair Labor Standards Act. Telecommuters may work traditional hours or follow alternative work schedules (AWS) which offer a wide variety of flexible and compressed work schedules.

Agencies should schedule work hours in accordance with the individual employee's work requirements regardless of work location. Failure to properly schedule work may make the agency liable for premium pay under title 5, USC.

The supervisor and the telecommuter should agree on the days and times that the employee will work in each setting. The schedule can parallel those in the main office or be specific to the worksite. For example, a telecommuter who works from 7:00 am to 3:30 pm at the main office, may be assigned the same schedule when working at the center. Alternatively, the same telecommuter may be assigned to work from 9:30 to 6:00 or some other schedule at the center. As long as the schedules are consistent with agency AWS policies and applicable labor contracts, the variety of such schedule combinations is unlimited and should be geared to the employee's personal and job requirements. The process of establishing work schedules should be sufficiently flexible to permit periodic adjustments, if any, to achieve an optimal schedule suiting employee and organizational requirements.

Published opinions by telecommuting experts suggest that it is beneficial for telecommuters to spend at least part of the workweek in their main office. It is thought that this periodic presence in the main office will minimize isolation and communication problems; give the telecommuter access to

equipment, services, etc. not available at the alternate workplace; facilitate integration of the employee with those in the main office; and, also, ease supervisor adjustment to the new work arrangement. Agencies may elect, however, to allow telecommuters to work their full schedules at the telecenter.

2. Leave

The current rules and procedures for leave administration apply to telecommuters. The location of an employee's worksite has no impact on these rules; these rules depend on the work schedule.

3. Certification and Control of Time and Attendance (T&A)

Although agencies establish their own procedures for certifying time and attendance, those procedures must follow standards set by the U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO) in its Policy and Procedures Manual for the Guidance of Federal Agencies (Title 6).

The GAO guidelines require agencies with employees working at remote sites to provide reasonable assurance that they are working when scheduled. Such assurance can be achieved by supervisor determination of the reasonableness of work output for the time spent or by occasional supervisor telephone calls or visits during the employee's scheduled work hours at the center. The technique of determining reasonableness of work output for the time spent is consistent with managing by results and is recommended by experts for use with telecommuters.

4. Administrative Leave, Dismissals, and Emergency Closing

In general, the organization responsible for operating the telecenter will have the authority and responsibility for emergency closing of the telecenter. That same organization will have the responsibility of informing the telecommuters and their respective agencies. Agencies may establish additional reporting procedures for telecommuters affected by center closing; such procedures should be spelled out in the telecommuters work agreement.

The telecenter may be unaffected by emergencies that lead to closing and dismissals at the central office. As may happen with different offices in the same metropolitan area, some may be affected by the emergency and others not. Whether telecenter or main government office, the principle is the same: if work can proceed at a particular worksite, then employees at that site should not be excused from duty just because other employees elsewhere have been dismissed or excused from reporting.

Agency guidelines on dismissals and closing should be sufficiently flexible to cover a variety of potential situations. For example, on a snow dismissal day for the main office, a telecommuter working at a center that is located outside the storm area may still be excused if performance of the employee's work is impossible without the operation of the central worksite.

SECTION D: DUTY STATION AND PAY ISSUES

1. Duty Station

It is recommended that agencies designate the telecommuter's main office as the official duty station for purposes of special salary rates and travel. The latter is likely to be the simplest and most economical approach. It should be noted, however, that agencies may make their own determinations.

2. Special Salary Rates

The special rates program is designed to assist agencies with recruitment and retention problems associated with Federal office locations. Using the recommended definition of official duty station will help prevent problems of differential and/or unfair treatment of employees in circumstances where the center and the main office are in different salary rate locations.

3. Premium Pay

Work schedules, not location, determine premium pay entitlement. Entitlement to premium pay, therefore, is not affected by the telecommuting arrangement.

4. Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA)

It is a responsibility of management to exercise appropriate supervision to ensure that only that work for which it intends to make payment is performed. Federal employees in positions designated as "nonexempt" benefit from the overtime provisions of FLSA. Overtime entitlements under the FLSA are independent of those provided under title 5, USC. The FLSA generally sets overtime standards of 8 hours per day and 40 hours per week. Under title 5, agencies pay only for overtime officially ordered and approved. Under the FLSA, however, employees may earn overtime pay even though the overtime work was voluntary and not officially ordered or approved.

The FLSA counts as overtime any work that a supervisor "suffers or permits" his/her subordinates to work. Suffered and permitted overtime is any overtime work performed for the benefit of the agency, whether ordered or not, provided the supervisor knew or had reason to believe that the work was being performed and had a chance to stop it. Agencies should be careful about potential liability for "suffered or permitted" overtime under the FLSA which can strain personnel budgets and employee relations. See title 5, USC, CFR 551.401, 411, and 421. Scheduling work to avoid unnecessary overtime is a long standing public policy.

Agencies may not discipline nonexempt employees for working suffered or permitted overtime under the FLSA or for putting in claims for back pay under the FLSA.

5. Injuries, Continuation of Pay, Worker Compensation

Telecommuters qualify, under the Federal Employees Compensation Act (FECA), for continuation of pay (COP) or workers compensation for legitimate on-the-job injury or occupational illness. It is important to note that an injury incurred at the center by a telecommuter is handled in the same manner and by the same regulations as an injury incurred at the main office. Agencies should scrutinize any report of an injury incurred on the job to ensure proper determination of the case.

SECTION E: TELECOMMUNICATIONS, EQUIPMENT AND SERVICES

1. Telecommunications

The telecommunications required to support a telecenter will be much the same as what exists in a typical office environment. The General Services Administration Information Resources Management Services (IRMS) has contracts in place (the Purchase of Telecommunications Services (POTS), the Telecommunications Support Contract (TSC), etc.) which can provide electronic key and private branch exchanges telephone systems, as well as a wide array of communications support services. Telecenters can also support long distance service through use of the Federal Telecommunications System 2000 (FTS2000) Network. FTS2000 utilizes advanced technology in digital telecommunications and fiber optics to provide a comprehensive set of services and features to include voice, data, and video transmission.

2. Computers, Other Equipment, and Software

GSA's Federal Information Resources Management Regulations (FIRMR) provide general guidelines to Federal agencies for their policies on off-site end user computing (see FIRMR Bulletin 30). GSA also provides general guidelines to Federal agencies for use of computers offsite (See "FLEXIPLACE: Questions and Answers on Computer and telephone Issues," publication KMP-92-1-D). The indicated GSA documents can be obtained from GSA's Information Resources Management Reference Center.

Telecenters will provide varying levels of equipment and services; agencies, however, may place additional Government-owned equipment and software in telecenters. Each agency maintains full control over these items as accountable personal property. Government-owned equipment and services are for official use only. Documents created or modified using Government-owned equipment are Government property.

3. Remote Accessibility

Employees often need access to records, regulations, handbooks, manuals, and files normally maintained at the office site. Agencies that maintain this information in digital form can transmit it back and forth over telephone lines. If the information is available only in hardcopy form, facsimile machines can transmit and receive it.

4. Privacy Act Considerations

Records subject to the Privacy Act may not be disclosed to anyone except those authorized access as a requirement of their official responsibilities. Agencies should ensure that appropriate physical, administrative, and technical safeguards are used to protect the security and confidentiality of such records used at telecenters. Agencies should revise their record system notices as necessary to indicate that offsite system location is authorized. Policy guidance on information security and privacy is available in FIRMR bulletins C-19 and C-22 obtainable from GSA's Information Resources Management Reference Center.

5. Accommodating Disabled Employees

Current employment efforts which focus on accommodating disabled workers can be supplemented by flexible workplace arrangements. For information on work opportunities for disabled individuals, see the handbook, *Managing End User Computing for Users With Disabilities*, prepared by GSA's Clearinghouse on Computer Accommodation. Policy guidance for equipment that provides access for disabled employees is available in FIRMR Bulletins C-8 and C-10.

6. Training

To facilitate the successful functioning of this program, it is important that telecommuters, their supervisors, and others with project responsibilities understand the basics of telecommuting and telecenter operation. To achieve this goal, program participation will include the provision of training. This training will consist of two components:

- (1) Center Operation - This component will focus on procedures and other information directly associated with center operation. This includes information on utilizing facilities, equipment, and services available at the center; utilizing off-site facilities, services, and equipment available to the center; center operating procedures and policies; and so on.
- (2) Telecommuting - This component will focus on issues such as selecting and managing telecommuters, being a telecommuter, proper planning and preparation, etc.

SECTION F: LABOR-MANAGEMENT RELATIONS

Federal employee unions have a right to consult and negotiate, as appropriate, on regulations affecting conditions of employment, including telecommuting. Individual agencies must satisfy their National Consultation Rights obligations under 5 USC 7113 with the National Offices of unions granted those rights by the agency (also see management rights under 5 USC 7106.) Negotiations with local unions may also be required.

In an organization where employees are represented by a labor organization accorded exclusive recognition under 5 USC Chapter 71, management is obligated to notify the union concerning the program prior to implementation and to bargain in good faith on any negotiable proposals submitted by the union. Unions recognized as exclusive bargaining agents also have the right to negotiate on impact and implementation of the telecommuting arrangement. For instance, unions may have input into the types of positions/employees eligible for participation and the procedures to be utilized in performance appraisal, time and attendance monitoring, criteria for evaluation, and other areas of the project.

Agencies should consult with unions during the early stages of program planning. Labor-management partnership in creating telecommuting programs can go a long way to disarm suspicion and prevent unnecessary disputes. While labor-management cooperation is not a replacement for collective bargaining, it can be an important factor for the successful implementation of the telecommuting program.

SECTION G: LIABILITY AND RESPONSIBILITY ISSUES

The General Services Administration has the responsibility of ensuring that the telecenter meets applicable standards for facilities housing Federal employees. The telecenter operator has the responsibility for ensuring that the facility continues to meet those standards. Also, the telecenter operator is responsible for a timely response to problems or concerns expressed by center clients and telecommuters.

As mentioned above, Federal employees are covered by the Workers Compensation Employment Act for injuries or occupational illness incurred while working at the telecenter. Depending on the nature of an incident and the contractual arrangement between the telecenter operator and the building owner, either the telecenter operator or the building owner will be liable for damages or other costs incurred by telecenter clients as a result of problems occurring at the telecenter.

SECTION IV

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS on FEDERAL TELECOMMUTING (FLEXIPLACE)

1. **Q. What is Flexiplace? Is it the same as telecommuting?**
 - A. Flexiplace is the abbreviated name for the Federal Flexible Workplace Program. This program provides employees the opportunity to work all or part of the work week (generally on a regular basis) at alternative worksites away from the main worksite. Typically, the alternative worksite is the employee's home or a satellite work center geographically convenient to the employee's home. Working at an alternative worksite is called 'telecommuting' and such workers are called telecommuters.
2. **Q. What steps are needed to initiate Flexiplace?**
 - A. Refer to section I "GETTING STARTED" of this manual.
3. **Q. Does the Fair Labor Standards Act apply?**
 - A. Yes. Refer to the discussions of the Fair Labor Standards Act and Labor Relations in Section III of this document.
4. **Q. What types of jobs or tasks are adaptable to Flexiplace?**
 - A. Generally, any job that has tasks which are portable and can be performed away from the main worksite. The telecommuter and the supervisor can determine which specific tasks are adaptable to telecommuting.
5. **Q. Is Flexiplace a good way to employ disabled persons?**
 - A. Yes. See sections II and III of this document and GSA's FIRMR Bulletin 56 for more details.
6. **Q. What are the benefits of Flexiplace?**
 - A. There are many general benefits to Flexiplace, and there are benefits that will be specific to your organization and staff. Some examples might be:
 1. Improvements in employee morale and effectiveness.
 2. Reductions in transportation costs including car insurance, maintenance, and wear.
 3. Retention of skilled employees and reduction in turnover due in part to increased job satisfaction.
 4. Accommodation of employees with short or long term health problems or family responsibilities, such as problems associated with elder care and latch-key children.

5. Cost savings to the Government in regard to office space, sick leave absences, and energy conservation.
6. Employees can better use their peak productivity periods within the limits of established laws.
7. Reduction in automobile-created air pollution and traffic congestion.
8. Potential for increased productivity.
9. Improved work atmosphere due to fewer co-worker nonbusiness interruptions.

7. Q. Who may participate in flexiplace?

- A. Agency policy will determine most criteria; see sections II and III for recommended criteria.

8. Q. Does an employee have a right to be a telecommuter?

- A. No. Flexiplace participation is not a right. Management is responsible for deciding if the position is one that is appropriate for offsite work and for examining both the content of the work and the performance of the employee. Because this is a management work option, there is no automatic right of the employee to continue participation in the event of a change of supervisor.

9. Q. Can a supervisor participate in the flexible workplace program?

- A. Yes.

10. Q. Who is liable for work-related injuries and/or damages at the alternate worksite?

- A. The Government. Government employees suffering work-related injuries and/or damages at the alternate worksite are covered under the Military Personnel and Civilian Employees Claims Act, the Federal Tort Claims Act, or the Federal Employees Compensation Act (workers compensation).

11. Q. What should a manager consider before agreeing to a Flexiplace arrangement?

- A. The manager and worker should examine the job requirements and determine what tasks can be accomplished at an alternate worksite. Additionally, the manager should determine
- if the employee has the skill and knowledge of the job to work at the alternate site;
 - if the employee needs work-related input or support that is only available at the main office;
 - the equipment and related costs necessary to support an alternate worksite;
 - how the employee can meet the requirements of any face-to-face or other type of internal contact that the job requires;

- policies and procedures necessary to insure the integrity and security of information.

12. Q. How will work performance be monitored? Will telecommuting lead to a decline in work performance?

A. Generally, telecommuting performance should be monitored in the same way main worksite performance is monitored. Optimally, performance should be monitored on a results-oriented basis (see section III under performance standards, for a discussion of management by results). The manager will have to carefully plan and identify the nature and objective of the task, perhaps by establishing deadlines or arranging for progress reports and meetings. Most studies of telecommuters have reported that telecommuting job performance equals or exceeds pre-telecommuting performance.

13. Q. Should a specific schedule be set for work at the alternate worksite?

A. Yes. All work schedules are discretionary and require management approval. A pre-set schedule of flexiplace work hours should be established prior to the employee working at the alternate worksite. Temporary flexiplace assignments or changes in work schedule may be made at management's discretion to meet work needs or to accommodate the employee.

14. Q. Can an employee use flexitime and alternate work schedules along with alternate worksites (flexiplace)?

A. Yes. Managers may approve the combined use of flexitime and flexiplace. Reports from telecommuting programs recommend that optimal utilization of either program can be achieved through their combined use.

15. Q. What about the impact on the office when some employees are working at the alternate worksites?

A. Certain guidelines must be established to minimize adverse impact on other staff members before employees begin to work at alternate worksites. The overall interests of the office must take precedence over working at alternate sites. A supervisor may require an employee to work at the main worksite on a day scheduled for an alternate worksite if the needs of the office so require. Flexiplace should not put a burden on staff remaining in the office. An equitable distribution of workload should be maintained and methods should be instituted to ensure that main office employees are not saddled with telecommuter responsibilities.

16. Q. What is the telecommuter's official duty station?

A. The agency makes this determination. Generally, it is recommended that the telecommuter's official duty station be the main office. All pay, special salary rates, leave, and travel entitlements are based on the official duty station.

17. Q. What if a manager or a telecommuter believes the flexiplace arrangement is not working out?

A. Flexible workplace arrangements are not a right or condition of employment. Management may end an employee's participation in flexiplace if the employee's performance declines or if the pilot is detrimental to organizational needs. Also, the employee may end participation at anytime without cause.

18. Q. Will the employee be reimbursed for utility expenses associated with an alternate worksite?

A. No. The Government assumes no responsibility for the telecommuter's expenses related to heating, electricity, water, and space usage.

19. Q. Can the Government pay for the installation of a telephone line in a private residence?

A. Yes. The Treasury, Postal Service, General Government Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 1992, Public Law 102-141, Sec. 625, signed into law October 28, 1991, states:
"Notwithstanding any provisions of this Act or any other Act, during the fiscal year ending September 30, 1992, any department, division, bureau or office participating in the Federal Flexiplace Project may use funds appropriated in this or any other Act to install telephone lines, necessary equipment, and to pay monthly charges, in any private residence or private apartment: Provided, that the head of the department, division, bureau or office certifies that adequate safeguards against private misuse exist, and that the service is necessary for direct support of the Agency's mission. This temporary legislation has been extended and the authority to install telephone lines is still in effect."

20. Q. What equipment will the employee need at the alternate worksite and who will provide it?

A. The needed equipment and who will provide it will vary by situation. Generally speaking, organizations are not required to provide equipment at alternate worksites. Each Agency must establish its own policies on the provision and installation of equipment.

21. Q. Are there restrictions on the use of the Government-owned equipment, software or information at an alternate worksite?

A. Yes. Government-owned equipment can be used for official purposes only. Telecommuters must adhere to all rules, regulations, and procedures relating to security and confidentiality of work-related information and data. Agencies allowing employees to access records subject to the Privacy Act from an alternate worksite must maintain appropriate administrative, technical, and physical safeguards to ensure the security and confidentiality of the records. The Agency should revise appropriate records to indicate that the alternate worksite is authorized for the use and maintenance of classified or confidential information and data.

22. Q. Who is responsible for maintaining and servicing Government or privately owned equipment used at the alternate worksite?

A. Generally, the Government will be responsible for the service and maintenance of Government-owned equipment. Also generally, telecommuters using their own equipment are responsible for

its service and maintenance.

23. Q. Flexiplace seems like an ideal solution to child or other dependent care issues.

- A. Not exactly. Telecommuting can provide valuable assistance with dependent care, but it is not likely to be a comprehensive solution. Telecommuters should consider carefully the feasibility of any plans to mix dependent care and work. Studies have shown that this can lead to problems with both job performance and quality of care. It is likely that telecommuters will continue to require additional help with their dependent care responsibilities.

24. Q. What are some pitfalls and how can they be avoided?

- A. Many of the common pitfalls that new telecommuters and their supervisors may encounter have already been identified. Fortunately, ways to avoid these situations have also been developed. Much of the training for telecommuters and their supervisors addresses how to get started correctly and how to deal with problem situations as they arise. Following are some examples of the common pitfalls to avoid:

o Establishing rigid agency-wide operating policies and procedures which do not allow supervisors and participants room to adjust the program to suit their needs. Flexibility within reasonable legal parameters is a key ingredient in establishing agency policies. Rigidity, on the other hand, can ruin the experience for participating organizations.

o Allowing problem employees in the program. Unless there is a careful diagnosis indicating that flexiplace is a specific remedy, problem employees will remain problems in the program and jeopardize the program for others.

o Allowing employees in the program without adequate Flexiplace training (orientation). Employees and their supervisors need to understand the relevant policies, procedures, and other factors associated with successful operation of Flexiplace. Without such understanding, unnecessary problems can occur which put a strain on the operation of the program.

o Not informing and working with unions in a timely manner. Agencies planning to allow union represented employees in the program should include unions in the process as early as possible in the planning stages. Unions perceiving they have been bypassed or caught off-guard are not likely to respond favorably to the implementation effort.

o Starting the programs without proper planning and preparation. Supervisors should not begin the program until they have worked out operating procedures, expectations, schedules, lines of communication, etc. with both participants and non-participants. Premature start-up places unnecessary strain on an organization which is already trying to adjust to a new circumstance.

o Automated monitoring of employee performance (monitoring an employee's key strokes and time on/off a computer via electronic devices, e.g.). Such monitoring has been shown to create stressful working conditions, is the subject of proposed Congressional legislation banning such monitoring, and is contrary to the management by results philosophy of Flexiplace.

- o Allowing Flexiplace to inconvenience and/or unfairly burden non-participating employees. Inadequate planning and preparation can lead to this situation which causes both morale and job performance problems.
- o Not adequately informing co-workers regarding the telecommuter's office schedule and/or attempting to hide the program from co-workers.
- o Not developing a clear understanding between the manager and the telecommuter regarding work expectations .

APPENDIX A

Sample Agreement Between Agency and Employee Approved for Flexiplace on a Continuing Basis

The supervisor and the employee should each keep a copy of the agreement for reference.

(Agency) _____ (Employee) _____

Voluntary Participation

Employee voluntarily agrees to work at the agency-approved alternative workplace indicated below and to follow all applicable policies and procedures. Employee recognizes that the flexiplace arrangement is not an employee benefit but an additional method the agency may approve to accomplish work.

Trial Period

Employee and agency agree to try out the arrangement for at least *[specify number]* months unless unforeseeable difficulties require earlier cancellation.

Salary and Benefits

Agency agrees that a flexiplace arrangement is not a basis for changing the employee's salary or benefits.

Duty Station and Alternative Workplace

Agency and employee agree that the employee's official duty station is: *[indicate duty station for main office]* and that the employee's approved alternative workplace: *[specify street and number, city, and State]*

Note: All pay, leave and travel entitlements are based on the official duty station.

Official Duties

Unless otherwise instructed, employee agrees to perform official duties only at the main office or agency-approved alternative workplace. Employee agrees not to conduct personal business while in official duty status at the alternative workplace, for example, caring for dependents or making home repairs.

Work Schedule and Tour of Duty

Agency and employee agree the employee's official tour of duty will be: *[specify days, hours, and location, i.e., the main office or the alternative workplace]*.

Time and Attendance

Agency agrees to make sure the flexiplace employee's timekeeper has a copy of the employee's work schedule. The supervisor agrees to certify biweekly the time and attendance for hours worked at the main office and the alternative workplace. (Note: agency may require employee to complete self certification form.)

Leave

Employee agrees to follow established office procedures for requesting and obtaining approval of leave.

Overtime

Employee agrees to work overtime only when ordered and approved by the supervisor in advance and understands that working overtime without such approval may result in termination of the flexiplace privilege and/or other appropriate action.

Equipment\Supplies

Employee agrees to protect any Government-owned equipment and to use the equipment only for official purposes. The agency agrees to install, service and maintain any Government-owned equipment issued to the flexiplace employee. The employee agrees to install, service, and maintain any personal equipment used. The agency agrees to provide the employee with all necessary office supplies and also reimburse the employee for business-related long distance telephone calls.

Security

If the Government provides computer equipment for the alternative workplace, employee agrees to the following security provisions: *[insert agency-specific language]*

Liability

The employee understands that the Government will not be liable for damages to an employee's personal or real property while the employee is working at the approved alternative workplace, except to the extent the Government is held liable by the Federal Tort Claims Act or the Military Personnel and Civilian Employees Claims Act.

Work Area

The employee agrees to provide a work area adequate for performance of official duties.

Worksite Inspection

The employee agrees to permit the Government to inspect the alternative workplace during the employee's normal working hours to ensure proper maintenance of Government-owned property and conformance with safety standards. (Agencies may require employees to complete a self-certification safety checklist.)

Alternative Workplace Costs

The employee understands that the Government will not be responsible for any operating costs that are associated with the employee using his or her home as an alternative worksite, for example, home maintenance, insurance, or utilities. The employee understands he or she does not relinquish any entitlement to reimbursement for authorized expenses incurred while conducting business for the Government, as provided for by statute and regulations.

Injury Compensation

Employee understands he or she is covered under the Federal Employee's Compensation Act if injured in the course of actually performing official duties at the main office or the alternative duty station. The employee agrees to notify the supervisor immediately of any accident or injury that

occurs at the alternative workplace and to complete any required forms. The supervisor agrees to investigate such a report immediately.

Work Assignments/Performance

Employee agrees to complete all assigned work according to procedures mutually agreed upon by the employee and the supervisor and according to guidelines and standards in the employee's performance plan. The employee agrees to provide regular reports if required by the supervisor to help judge performance. The employee understands that a decline in performance may be grounds for cancelling the alternative workplace arrangement.

Disclosure

Employee agrees to protect Government/agency records from unauthorized disclosure or damage and will comply with requirements of the Privacy Act of 1974, 5 U.S.C. 552a.

Standards of Conduct

Employee agrees he or she is bound by agency standards of conduct while working at the alternative worksite.

Cancellation

Agency agrees to let the employee resume his or her regular schedule at the main office after notice to the supervisor. Employee understands that the agency may cancel the flexiplace arrangement and instruct the employee to resume working at the main office. The agency agrees to follow any applicable administrative or negotiated procedures.

Other Action

Nothing in this agreement precludes the agency from taking any appropriate disciplinary or adverse action against an employee who fails to comply with the provisions of this agreement.

(Employee's Signature and Date) _____
(Supervisor's Signature and Date) _____

APPENDIX B

WORKSTATION (HOME OFFICE OR TELECENTER) DESIGN/INSPECTION GUIDELINES

The following information is provided to assist you in designing, establishing, adjusting, and/or inspecting your workstation at the alternate worksite. An adequate workstation should be safe and comfortable and should facilitate your job performance. The following guide will familiarize you with many of the desirable aspects as well as hazards in an office work environment. If you suspect that something is hazardous, but are not sure, you can contact your Agency/Regional Safety and Health Manager for assistance. **It is recommended that you maintain this Guide as a reference source.**

WORKING OR WALKING SURFACES

Surfaces should be level and free of tripping, bumping, or slipping hazards. Things to look for include: torn carpet; electrical or telephone cords in walkways; partition support brackets, waste baskets, portable heaters, fans, etc. placed in walkways; file cabinet drawers and/or bookcase doors that open into an aisle; misaligned furniture; temporary or permanent storage that narrows or obstructs aisles; doors that open into aisles or narrow halls, etc.

ELECTRICAL SAFETY

There are numerous safety considerations involved in the use of electrically powered equipment and appliances. These center around three hazards - shock, burns, and fire.

- o **Grounding:** Generally most homes/buildings are provided with three wire grounded electrical outlets. These should be checked for correct wiring and adequacy of grounds by the owner and/or appropriate officials. You should look for cracked or broken outlets, missing covers which expose the wiring or signs of arcing or burns around the outlet.

The subject of grounding for office type equipment is difficult to cover in this amount of space. As a general rule, if an appliance comes from the manufacturer with a three prong plug, the ground pin should not be broken off nor should the device be used ungrounded via a two prong adapter or extension cord. Large appliances such as refrigerators, computers, paper copiers, etc., as well as heating devices such as coffee pots, hot plates, etc., should be grounded. If you have any doubt about a particular device, contact your Agency/Regional Safety and Health Manager.

- o **Electrical Cords:** Appliance and equipment cords should be checked for proper connection to the device, frayed or damaged insulation, defective plug, and exposed wires on a regular basis. The use of extension cords in the workplace should be limited and closely controlled. Extension cords are to be used only on a "temporary basis." If the condition where they are used calls for "long term use," then electrical outlets should be moved, added, or whatever proper corrective action may be necessary.

Try rearranging the furniture or adding additional electrical outlets before using extension cords. When they are used, they should be of the same or larger wire size as the cord being extended, and have a compatible connector plug. If an adapter is needed to connect the device to an extension cord, the wrong extension cord is being used.

CAUTION

Extension cords must never be draped over furniture, partitions, equipment, etc., or extended across aisles or walkways, nor extended through doors, walls, ceiling, etc., and never located under carpeting.

- o **Electrical Outlets:** A major cause of fire is overloaded electrical circuits. This usually occurs through the use of multiple outlet adapters or extension cords with a multiple outlet connector. Limit the number of devices connected to any outlet to the number of receptacles provided by the outlet. If additional outlets are needed, they should be properly installed by a qualified electrician.

ELECTRICAL EQUIPMENT

There is not really too much you can inspect on electrical equipment without some special training and testing equipment. You can, however, determine that it is properly connected with a cord which is in good condition, that the device is not generating excessive heat, and that it is operating as intended. After looking it over, ask someone about the equipment. Does it operate OK? Does it ever give you a mild electrical shock, etc.?

FIRE PROTECTION & SUPPRESSION

Fire protection and suppression take many forms. Some of the most easily recognized are: fire extinguishers; alarm systems; fire hoses and standpipe systems; smoke detectors; sprinkler systems; and heat detectors. Where they exist, all must be maintained in proper working order at all times to ensure safety.

- o **Fire Alarm Systems:** Generally speaking, homes/buildings above one story in height have or are expected to have some type of approved fire alarm/notification system. There are many different types of systems, some very simple and some very complex. A basic system, one that can be found in quite a few of the buildings in which we work, consists of an annunciator panel which indicates if the system is working properly and where the alarm has been activated, by identifying locations of wall-mounted pull stations (used by persons/employees who want to manually activate the system) and other alarm devices (bells, horns, sirens, lights, etc.).

There are many different ways a fire alarm system can be activated. Some of the most common are: through the use of one of its pull stations or via a smoke or heat detector. Telecommuters should know how to activate the fire alarm system that protects the homes/buildings where they work.

Fire alarm system questions that should be asked periodically include:

- o Is the system working properly?
- o Can the alarm be heard and/or seen by all of the building's occupants?
- o Is the alarm tested and inspected regularly?
- o Does the alarm notify the local fire and/or police department or a local alarm

monitoring company?

- o Are all of the building's occupants familiar with how the system works and sounds?
 - o Is there a sufficient number of activation devices?
 - o Do the activation devices work?
 - o Are the activation devices easily identifiable?
- o Fire Extinguishers:** Are there enough of the proper type of fire extinguishers and are they properly positioned? Fire extinguishers should be permanently mounted. The location of fire extinguishers must be clearly marked. If the view of an extinguisher is obstructed by partitions, furniture, corners, etc., then a directional arrow fire extinguisher location sign or some kind of marking is needed. The access to a fire extinguisher should never be blocked, even temporarily. The travel distance to reach an extinguisher should not exceed 75 feet.

All fire extinguishers should be checked regularly and inspected at least annually. They must have a tag attached showing the inspection date. Fire extinguishers must be hydrostatically tested every five to twelve years. Look for a metal tag or decal showing the last test date.

If the extinguisher has a gauge, check to see that it is "full." Usually, this means that the gauge's arrow/needle is pointing straight up. Examine the fire extinguisher's hose and discharge nozzle for damage. Also check to see that the handle locking pin, or wire is intact. If not, the extinguisher could have been used and now has to be refilled.

If the extinguisher has any damage, especially surface damage such as dents, or has been discharged or tampered with, it must be reinspected by a qualified person.

- o Sprinkler Systems:** Some facilities have automatic sprinkler protection. If your alternate work area has this, check to see that the sprinkler heads have not been painted. Paint can clog the sprinkler head and prevent it from operating properly. Storage under and around sprinkler heads should be limited to no closer than 18 inches in any direction to allow ample clearance for the water spray. Do not permit anything to be attached to or suspended from a sprinkler head. Ideally, the sprinkler system should be tied into the building's fire alarm system so that when a sprinkler head is activated, the proper authorities are notified immediately.

STORAGE

The storing of any item on top of tall furniture or cabinets should be prohibited. To permit this practice sets the stage for many types of injuries. Employees attempting to place things on top of furniture or cabinets can strain themselves, can fall if chairs are used in place of ladders or even if ladders are used incorrectly. The items themselves can fall, striking employees. It is best to limit storage to designated storage rooms/areas.

A good practice is to limit storage height to maintain a minimum of 18 inches clearance from the ceiling in general, and from light fixtures and other electrical equipment in particular. If sprinkler protection is provided in the work or storage room, maintain as much clearance between stored items and the sprinkler head as possible; again, 18 inches is a good minimum clearance. Check to see that heavy items are stored on lower shelves. Have a ladder or approved step stool available so you can safely reach high places within the work or storage area.

HEATERS

Care should be exercised when using portable heaters. Be sure that the heating element is guarded against accidental contact, positioned not too close to furniture or other combustibles, and that a tip-over switch cuts off electrical power to the heating element if the heater is knocked over. This feature could prevent the heater from starting a fire. Kerosene heaters should not be used in the work area.

COFFEE POTS OR SIMILAR ITEMS

Use of coffee pots and similar items in the immediate work area should be placed out of normal walk areas and on a noncombustible surface. Never place such a device in a storeroom, closet, or other location where it cannot be observed. If the device is in a location where it cannot be observed, it could smolder, start a fire and spread beyond control before being detected. Should an electrical short-circuit occur, quick action is necessary to prevent fire. Be sure that all of these types of electrical equipment are turned off at the end of the day. Use of immersion-type water heaters, for coffee or tea cups, should be avoided.

RADIATORS

Some older homes/buildings use radiators for heat instead of the more modern forced air systems. If your work area has radiators, be sure not to place combustibles or flammable articles on or near them. Also check to assure that electrical power cords are not allowed to "drape" across them.

WORKSTATIONS

In the office environment, the work station consists primarily of a work surface of some type, a chair, VDT equipment, and other related items. Individual body size must be considered and will influence the design of the chair, the height of the work surface and access to various elements of the work station, including the video display section. A height-adjustable work surface is an advantage. In general, a good VDT work surface will provide as many adjustable features as possible.

Following are some tips on the use and design of typical workstations:

- o Sit up straight, keeping your neck as nearly vertical as comfortable. Improper neck, arm, and wrist positioning are typical causes for strains, other injuries, and discomfort.
- o Common recommendations are to have your computer screen at an arm's length from your face and slightly below eye level.
- o Use pads or other devices to comfortably support your wrists when using a keyboard. Keep your arms and wrists straight (try not to bend your wrists).

VIDEO DISPLAY TERMINALS (MONITORS)

"Video Display Terminals," commonly referred to as VDTs or monitors, display information on a television-like screen. Due to the expanding use of VDTs, concerns have been expressed about their potential health effects. Complaints include excessive fatigue; eye strain and irritation; headaches; stress; and neck, back, arm, and/or muscle pain. Other concerns include physical discomfort, cumulative trauma disorders, and potential exposure to radiation.

Visual symptoms can result from improper lighting, glare from the screen, positioning of the screen,

or copy material that is difficult to read. VDT operators can reduce eyestrain by temporarily looking away from the VDT, doing eye exercises, switching to other work or adjusting the brightness of the VDT screen.

VDT operators are subject to the risk of developing various musculoskeletal and nerve disorders, such as cumulative, or repetitive motion disorders. Carpal Tunnel Syndrome (CTS), a cumulative trauma disorder, is caused by repetitive wrist-hand movement and exertion. When irritated, the tendons and their sheaths housed inside the carpal tunnel swell and press against the nearby median nerve. The pressure causes tingling, numbness, or severe pain in the wrist and hand. CTS can be reduced by stopping or limiting VDT activity, by maintaining proper posture, or as a last resort, surgery.

THE DESK

The height of the work surface should be comfortable for typical uses (computer work, writing, or reading). Conventional desk surfaces are usually about 29 inches high, which is adequate for many tasks. The height recommended for a computing surface is approximately 26 inches.

THE CHAIR

The chair is probably the most important piece of furniture in your work station. The seat should be adjustable, and the height (measured from the floor) of the top surface of the seat should be 15 to 21 inches. The backrest should be adjustable (height and angle) and should provide support for the telecommuter's lower back. Armrests should be substantial enough to provide support, but not so large as to be in the way.

LIGHTING

The lighting in your workstation can affect comfort, visibility, and performance. Whether you're using natural daylight or artificial lighting, it should be directed toward the side or behind your line of vision, not in front or above it. Bright light sources can bounce off working surfaces and diminish your sense of contrast. Northern daylight is the best light for your workstation and for operating a computer.

NOISE

Depending on your personality and work style, noisy or totally noise-free environments can be distracting and stressful. Some background sound such as music can be beneficial in maintaining a level of productivity and reducing boredom.

SELF-CERTIFICATION SAFETY CHECKLIST FOR HOME-BASED TELECOMMUTERS

NAME: _____ **ORGANIZATION:** _____

ADDRESS: _____ **CITY/STATE:** _____

BUSINESS TELEPHONE: _____ **FLEXIPLACE COORDINATOR:** _____

Dear Telecommuter:

The following checklist is designed to assess the overall safety of your alternate duty station. Please read and complete the self-certification safety checklist. Upon completion, you and your supervisor should sign and date the checklist in the spaces provided.

The alternate duty station is _____.

Describe the designated work area in the alternate duty station.

_____.

A. WORKPLACE ENVIRONMENT

1. Are temperature, noise, ventilation, and lighting levels adequate for maintaining your normal level of job performance? Yes [] No []
2. Are all stairs with 4 or more steps equipped with handrails? Yes [] No []
3. Are all circuit breakers and/or fuses in the electrical panel labeled as to intended service? Yes [] No []
4. Do circuit breakers clearly indicate if they are in the open or closed position? Yes [] No []
5. Is all electrical equipment free of recognized hazards that would cause physical harm (frayed wires, bare conductors, loose wires, flexible wires running through walls, exposed wires to the ceiling)? Yes [] No []
6. Will the building's electrical system permit the grounding of electrical equipment? Yes [] No []
7. Are aisles, doorways, and corners free of obstructions to permit visibility and movement? Yes [] No []

- 8. Are file cabinets and storage closets arranged so drawers and doors do not open into walkways? Yes [] No []
- 9. Do chairs have any loose casters (wheels) and are the rungs and legs of the chairs sturdy? Yes [] No []
- 10. Are the phone lines, electrical cords, and extension wires secured under a desk or alongside a baseboard? Yes [] No []
- 11. Is the office space neat, clean, and free of excessive amounts of combustibles? Yes [] No []
- 12. Are floor surfaces clean, dry, level, and free of worn or frayed seams? Yes [] No []
- 13. Are carpets well secured to the floor and free of frayed or worn seams? Yes [] No []
- 14. Is there enough light for reading? Yes [] No []

B. COMPUTER WORKSTATION (IF APPLICABLE)

- 15. Is your chair adjustable? Yes [] No []
- 16. Do you know how to adjust your chair? Yes [] No []
- 17. Is your back adequately supported by a backrest? . Yes [] No []
- 18. Are your feet on the floor or fully supported by a footrest? Yes [] No []
- 19. Are you satisfied with the placement of your VDT and keyboard? Yes [] No []
- 20. Is it easy to read the text on your screen? Yes [] No []
- 21. Do you need a document holder? Yes [] No []
- 22. Do you have enough leg room at your desk? Yes [] No []
- 23. Is the VDT screen free from noticeable glare? . . . Yes [] No []
- 24. Is the top of the VDT screen eye level? Yes [] No []
- 25. Is there space to rest the arms while not keying? . . Yes [] No []
- 26. When keying, are your forearms close to parallel with the floor? Yes [] No []

27. Are your wrists fairly straight when keying? Yes [] No []

_____.
Employee Signature Date

_____.
Immediate Supervisor's Signature Date

(Approved [] Disapproved [])

**PLEASE RETURN A COPY OF THIS FORM TO YOUR
FLEXIPLACE COORDINATOR.**

APPENDIX C

SUPERVISORY - EMPLOYEE CHECKOUT LIST

The following checklist is designed to ensure that your flexiplace employee is properly oriented to the policies and procedures of the Flexiplace program. Questions 4, 5, and 6 may not be applicable to your flexiplace employee. If this is the case, simply state non-applicable or n/a.

NAME OF FLEXIPLACE EMPLOYEE _____

NAME OF IMMEDIATE SUPERVISOR _____

Date Completed

- 1. Employee has read guidelines outlining policies and procedures of the pilot program. _____
- 2. Employee has been provided with a schedule of core hours. _____
- 3. Employee has been issued/has not been issued equipment. _____
- 4. Equipment issued by the agency is documented. _____

Check as applicable: yes no

-computer	. . . . .	—	. . . . .	—
-modem	. . . . .	—	. . . . .	—
-fax machine	. . . . .	—	. . . . .	—
-telephone	. . . . .	—	. . . . .	—
-desk	. . . . .	—	. . . . .	—
-chair	. . . . .	—	. . . . .	—
-other _____	. . . . .	—	. . . . .	—

- 5. Policies and procedures for care of equipment issued by the agency have been explained and are clearly understood. _____
- 6. Policies and procedures covering classified, secure, or privacy act data have been discussed, and are clearly understood. _____
- 7. Requirements for an adequate and safe office space and/or area have been discussed, and the employee certifies those requirements are met. _____

8. Performance expectations have been discussed
and are clearly understood. _____

9. Employee understands that the supervisor may
terminate employee participation at any time,
in accordance with established administrative
procedures and union negotiated agreements. _____

10. Employee has participated in training for
Federal telecommuters. _____

Supervisor signature . . . _____
Employee signature

NOTICE

This document is disseminated under the sponsorship of the U.S. Department of Transportation in the interest of information exchange. The United States Government assumes no liability for its contents or use thereof.

The United States Government does not endorse manufacturers or products. Trade names appear in the document only because they are essential to the content of the report.

This report is being distributed through the U.S. Department of Transportation's Technology Sharing Program.

DOT-T-94-26

DOT-T-94-26

TECHNOLOGY SHARING
A Program of the U.S. Department of Transportation